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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005466

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/06/2016
TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM MOPS ASEC TH
SUBJECT: THAKSIN ADVISOR HEAPS SCORN ON OPPONENTS
REF: A. BANGKOK 5349 (BANKS BOMBED)

1B. BANGKOK 5204 (CAR BOMB)

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason: 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Efforts to destroy Prime Minister Thaksin represent the decrepit Thai royalist oligarchy's desire to overthrow democracy, according to close Thaksin advisor Pansak Vinyaratn. In a September 5 meeting with the Ambassador, Pansak claimed Thaksin intended to withdraw from politics after the next election, but his opponents would continue to harass him to try to force him out from office in September. Pansak assured the Ambassador the August 24 car bomb incident represented a genuine assassination attempt. He derided the Army Commander's recent call for negotiations with militants in southern Thailand and noted the Army was split along political lines. End Summary.

THAKSIN TO WITHDRAW... IF HE SURVIVES

12. (C) In a September 5 meeting with the Ambassador, Pansak Vinyaratn, one of Thaksin's closest advisors and political strategists, confirmed the Prime Minister's intention to withdraw from politics in the near future. When the Ambassador mentioned Thaksin's private remark that he would take this step after the upcoming legislative election, Pansak did not dispute the timing. However, he noted that Thaksin's enemies -- and specifically Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda -- hoped for his ouster in September. Prem and his allies hoped to get rid not only of Thaksin, but also Thailand's democratic system, Pansak asserted. The royalist oligarchy wanted to return to a prior era in which the Palace, not democratically elected politicians, would reign supreme.

13. (C) Pansak claimed Thaksin's enemies "want to assassinate him." They envisioned that this act would force the King to intervene in politics and prompt a restructuring of the current system of governance. Pansak assured the Ambassador that the August 24 car bomb incident (ref B) represented a genuine assassination attempt. As the Ambassador pressed for further detail, Pansak acknowledged that the plotters behind the car bomb likely had further plans in the works, and Thaksin's family members might become targets.

14. (C) Pansak claimed that Prem had signaled his intentions and intimidated two cabinet members (Cabinet Secretary Borwornsak Uwanno and Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam) into resigning in June. Pansak claimed that Prem

had sent a clear signal by asking their view on whether constitutional provisions allowing the King to take on a political role might be invoked in the event of Thaksin's death. (Note: This account differs from that provided directly to the Ambassador by Borwornsak -- septel. End Note.)

THAKSIN AS A DEMOCRAT LOYAL TO THE THRONE

¶ 15. (C) Machinations from the Palace stung all the more, Pansak claimed, because Thaksin had consistently shown respect for the royal court and had defended the King's interests. Thaksin had sought to protect the King's reputation when an American author recently published a tell-all book about the royal family. More importantly, Thaksin had taken steps to promote and protect the assets of the Crown Property Bureau (CPB). Thaksin had substantial assets of his own with Siam Commercial Bank (SCB), in which the CPB was a major stakeholder -- and an SCB figure who was also a relative of the Queen (NFI) had even represented Thaksin in negotiating the highly controversial sale of Shin Corp to Singapore's Temasek Holdings.

¶ 16. (C) The royalists, however, feared that Thaksin's policies, which benefited and empowered the rural majority, would erode their own standing. The royalists were against democracy, he noted, dismissing the critique that Thaksin had consolidated power to an extreme degree. Pansak cited the existence of over 2,300 community radio stations and over 1,000 print media outlets as proof that Thais under Thaksin enjoyed freedom of the press; only a minority of these outlets were anti-Thaksin -- and, ironically, their revenues had grown considerably because of the political crisis. (The

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Armed Forces monopolize television broadcasts, Pansak pointed out.)

¶ 17. (C) When the Ambassador asked whether Thaksin had acted wisely in dissolving the parliament in February, Pansak retorted that the decision was inconsequential. Whatever Thaksin did or did not do, his enemies would continue coming after him; unconstrained by legal or rational justifications, these opponents would find ways to attack. Tragically, while the royalists and oligarchs were undermining Thaksin, the political landscape was bereft of credible alternative leaders. Given the King's age, it was imperative for the Thai population to begin preparing psychologically for the King's passing and for a transition to a system increasingly reliant on democratic structures rather than royal authority. The current crisis forestalled such preparation, however. "It's all about Prem becoming Regent," Pansak warned.

A SPLIT ARMY

¶ 18. (C) Pansak dismissed with annoyance reports that Thaksin was influencing the upcoming reshuffle of military officers. However, Pansak acknowledged the military was split along political lines, and this lack of unity would prevent a move by Army Commander Sonthi Boonyaratglin against Thaksin. Pansak harshly derided Sonthi's recent public call for negotiations with militants active in southern Thailand: "Do you think we sit on our ass, doing nothing?" It was impossible to negotiate, however, when one could not identify the militants' leader. The timing of Sonthi's remark was also wrong, Pansak said. It sent a signal of weakness to call for negotiations right after a dramatic series of bomb attacks on banks in Yala province (ref A).

COMMENT

¶ 19. (C) Pansak adopted a defiant tone, but, although previously confident that Thaksin would prevail, he now

seemed resigned to the eventual triumph of those whom he considers to represent Thailand's old order. We noted he appeared to leave open the prospect of Thaksin being forced out of politics before the next election, contrary to the plan the Prime Minister himself had previously confided.

BOYCE